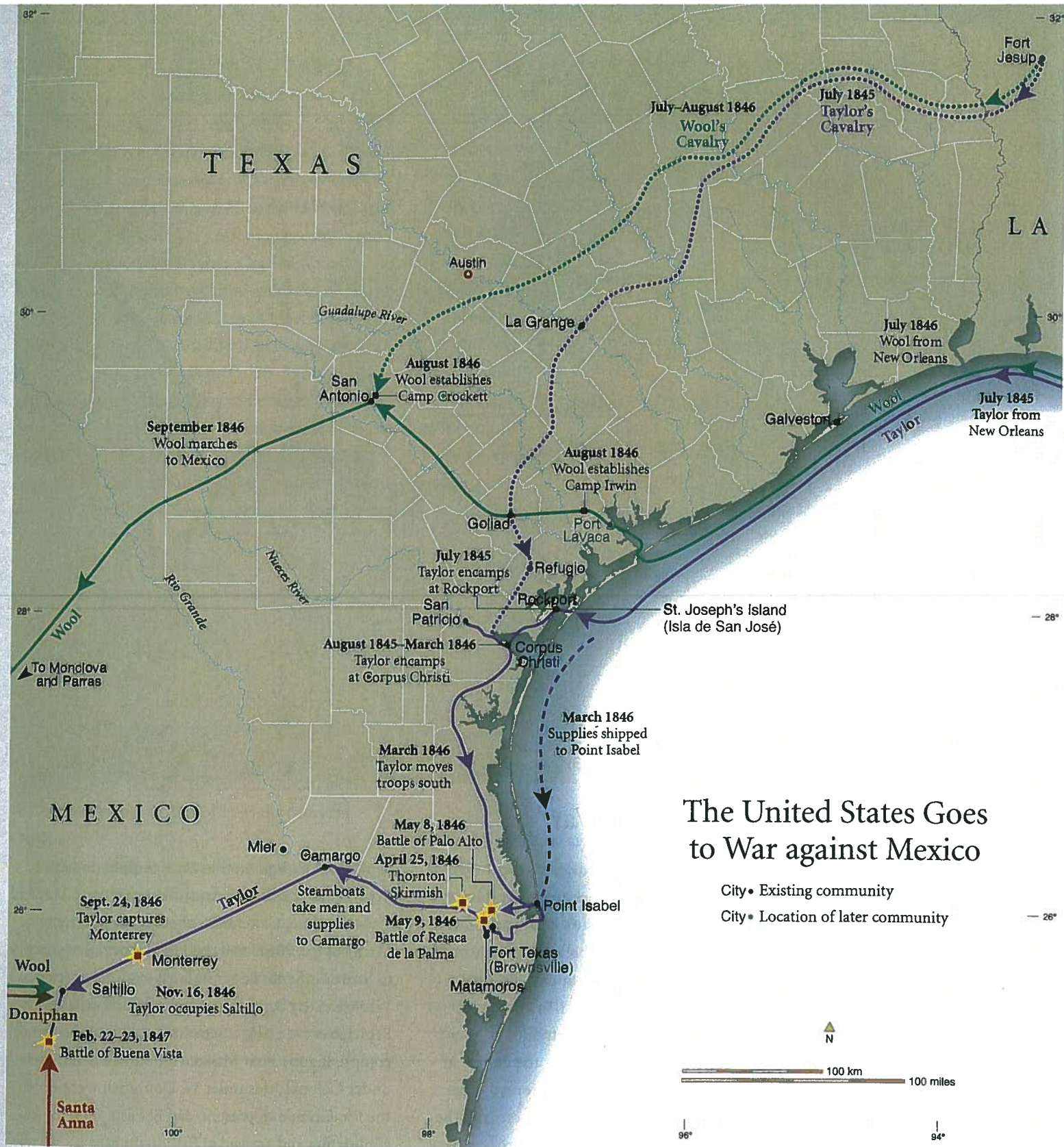


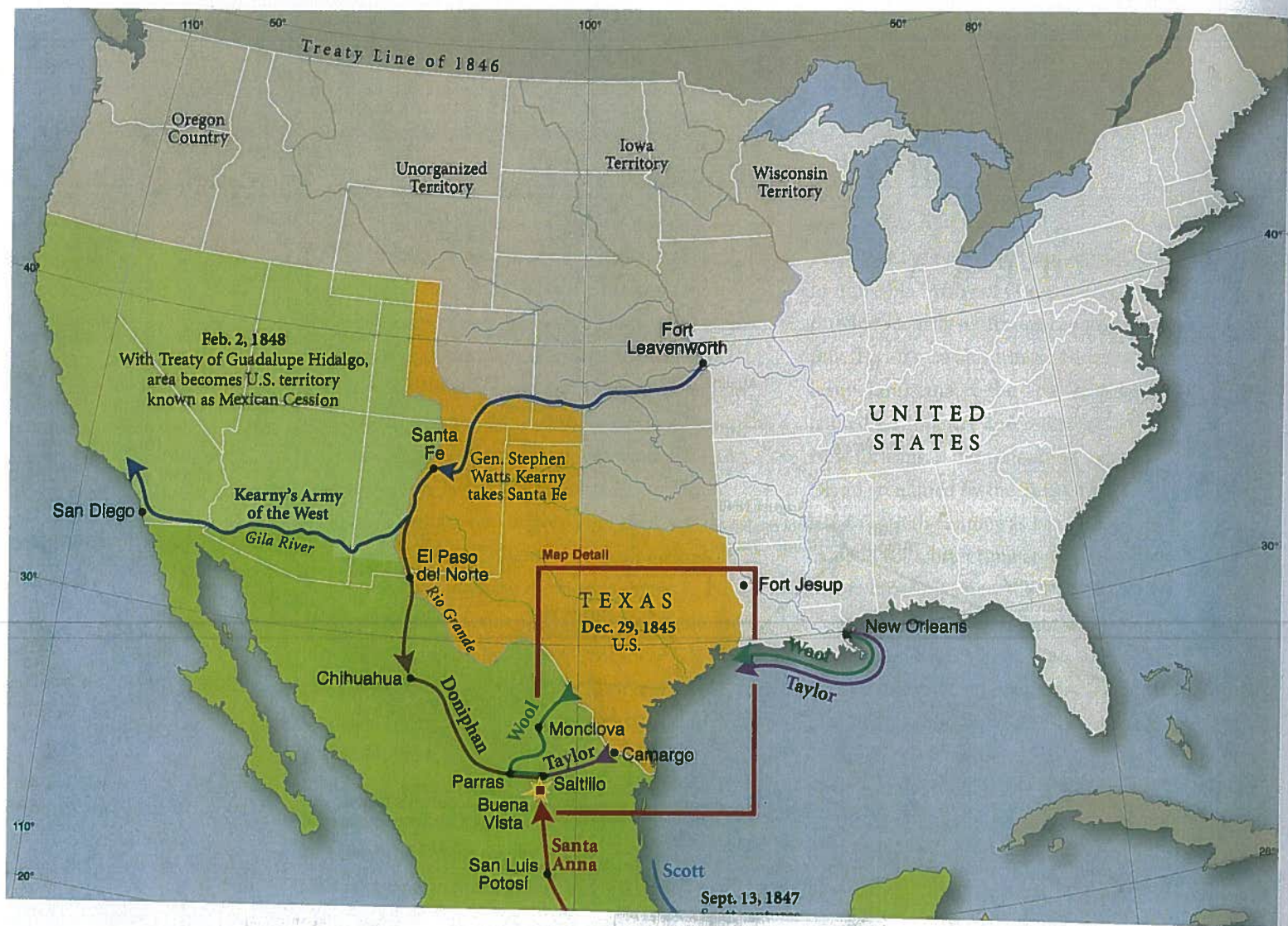


Growing Conflicts with Mexico



which he stated that the conflict had occurred because Mexico had "invaded our territory and shed American blood upon the American soil. She has proclaimed that hostilities have commenced, and that the two nations are now at war." The message

went to Congress on May 11. The war declaration passed the House of Representatives on May 11 by a vote of 174-14 and the Senate on May 12 by a vote of 40-2. President Polk signed the Declaration of War against Mexico on May 13, 1846.



**MEXICAN WAR JOURNAL of
CAPTAIN FRANKLIN SMITH**

1846

[Sailing to Brazos Santiago]

Tuesday 11th

It being reduced to a certainty that the steamship McKim Page Master would sail this day in which we were to embark for Brazos¹ I sallied out and made a few purchases among which were an India rubber cape and leggings – called on Col. Hunt who gave me orders to proceed to the mouth of the Rio Grande and report in person to Col. Davis² for temporary employment and to report by letter to Col. Henry Whiting³ asst. Qtr. M. General as my superior for permanent orders.

Very boisterous passage every body sick – boat rolled terribly on Thursday the 13th storm was so high that all the horses and mules aboard to the number of 9 or 10 were thrown overboard – It was a dreadful sign the mules and horses got loose and ran into the cabin at the same time – chairs tables and trunks were dashed to pieces – the mules and horses moaning and falling about

The steam and the season made the cabin so hot that it was impossible for me to sleep in it. I ate nothing from Wednesday morning until Sunday during the whole passage I staid on deck day and night fair and foul weather.

[At Brazos Santiago]

Sunday August 16th

reached Brazos Island landed on the sand about 12 o'clock. I never experienced such heat from the sun in my life – never saw so many flies

Monday, August 17th left Brazos in the “Rough and Ready” and finding the Mississippi Regiment at the Mouth of the Rio Grande stopped there. Found a great deal of sickness among our men.

[Getting Rifles and Effects of Valley Sun]

Tuesday 18 Ordered by Col. Davis to go to Brazos for the rifles⁶

Thursday 20th The Col.’s heart being altogether set [ink smudge on MS] on military glory ordered me back to inquire if the rest of the arms had arrived to have them transported to his camp immediately. I had to ride through the hot sun at 12. And when I got to Brazos I did not know whether I was living or dead. Indeed I expected every moment to fall from the horse

Saturday, 22nd Deviled to death trying to get the old muskets boxed up in time to go to Point Isabel.⁷ After trudging about in the sand and heat 3 or 4 hours the boat nevertheless got off.

Sick dreadful headache aching and pain in all my limbs.

laid on my blanket went to sleep as well as the flies would let me – they sting dreadfully – had a perspiration in the night.

Sunday 23rd The evening that I arrived at this place Dr. Halsey requested me to walk with him. When we reached the hospital tent I stood at the door while the doctor walked in. While the doctor was examining the other patients and prescribing a man lieing (*sic*) at the door of the tent near me was talking incoherently.

Tuesday August 25

All confusion carrying down tents etc. guns gun boxes pots and kettles to the landing got aboard the steam boat "Col. Cross"¹¹ all the troops sick and all numbering about 400 men-officers and privates inclusive this evening-got up steam the next morning and left for Camargo.

[Steamboat on Rio Grande. Description of river]

Wednesday August 26

Started at sunrise in the "Col. Cross" This was one of the boats purchased by Capt. Sanders¹² at Pittsburgh. Purchased to run the Rio Grande at a low stage of water. The water being now up even with banks of the river the boat large broad and flat bottomed and drawing only a foot and half of water. The current of the Rio Grande being more rapid than any current I ever saw¹³ – it is with great difficulty that she could stem the current. In spite of all efforts she was constantly running ashore driven on by the current.

[Description of Rio Grande Delta and Trees]

The banks of the Rio Grande up to Matamoras are low for the most part but there are many splendid localities for plantations – The land is rich as that of the Nile covered with the Georgia cane and chapperal [*sic*] and adapted to sugar rice corn cotton. In many places there was corn ripe and near to the ripe corn a second crop growing green as grass of various heights from 6 inches to 10 feet. The trees are scattering and low not higher than the ordinary blackjack. They are the musquite [*sic*] tree and other varieties of names of which I could not learn. For some twenty or thirty miles along the east bank in the neighborhood of Resaca De La Palma was to be seen a species of palm tree¹⁵ very beautiful. Burruta¹⁶ is a miserable little village of some dozen huts but lies high and fortified by an embankment. The land from Matamoras to Camargo all along both sides lies high is well adapted to cultivation and when the Anglo Saxons get to work on it will lay the region of the lower Mississippi in the shade. Let the government do

as it may the Americans will in a few years occupy both banks of this River along the whole levee. The darkness flies before the sun; Laziness cowardice and ignorance must give way before industry courage and intelligence.

[Contraband wine on steamboat]

Thursday, 27th

continued our voyage in the evening an officer high in command in the army called my attention to the fact that there were a greater many boxes of wine and other merchandise put out on the front lower deck near the bow of the boat not marked from the U.S. nor any officer. That doubtless they belonged to the Captain of the boat in violation of express regulations.

I took a witness Capt. Holland¹⁷ and went down on the lower deck and found some four or five piles of wine boxes containing 12 to 15 boxes in each pile. And there was also other boxes. I consulted with one of our officers what I should do he said he thought I had nothing to do with the matter. I reflected on the matter

Friday, August 28th

I made up my mind to the line of my duty. I went to the Quarter Master's office in Matamoras which I found after some trouble. I inquired for Col. Whiting he had gone to Camargo. I stated that I was ordered by Col. Hunt at Orleans to report to Col. Whiting.

I stated to him that I was green in my office and hardly knew the distinguishing line between duty and officiousness: that an officer high in command had called my attention the evening before to boxes of wine and merchandise which it was supposed belonged to Capt. Birmingham Capt. Of the boat:

Capt. Montgomery's reply was promptly made "sir you have done your duty you would have done wrong not to report such a case. I will have the facts investigated immediately."

[At Matamoros]

I knocked about the city of Matamoros a while saw drinking and gaming everywhere.

[Captain discharged for having contraband]

Capt. Birmingham was discharged the property seized for the freight and a new Captain, Capt. Pratt employed.

[Description of Matamoros and its people]

Matamoros is a good large city of about 12,000 inhabitants. The houses in the suburbs made of up right or sun burnt bricks covered with cane. However in the town brick all doubled doored and windows barred as all the houses in Mexico are. Flat roofs no chimneys.

The Mexicans are very cleanly man and woman have on course [coarse] clean cotton clothes and bathe in the river or lakes at least once a day.

[Steamboat driven to cornfield, wheel damaged]

We left Friday evening and right about 10 o'clock the "Col. Cross" was driven into a corn field by force of a current and shivered one of her wheels.

Unfortunately for the imprisoned cooped up disagreeably situated passengers the water was too high up over the ground to admit of going ashore without getting wet up to the knees.

[Making a wheel for steamboat]

Saturday August 29

The carpenter and blacksmith assisted by mechanicks found among the volunteer labored hard at making a new wheel. In the evening a steamboat came along and

took us higher up the river to a dry high landing near a large Rancho¹⁹ – beautiful place elegant land beautiful lake near the house.

Sunday August 30

at 10 o'clock the wheel was done steam up and the boat about to start when the steamer "Rough and Ready" coming down hailed to know if some box was on board being answered in the affirmative she ran along side but came upon us too fiercely struck our rudder and broke off the upper part [of] it. Here was another source of vexation and delay.

[A second crash]

That night about 10 o'clock the current struck the boat in sheering off from a point and drove it against a tree which grew out from the edge of the bank and leaned over the river crash crash crash went a part of the pilot House guards and some of the staterooms. All confusion and alarm.

[Suffering aboard steamboat]

Monday, August 31

still moving upriver every body dissatisfied unhappy the boat fetid and stinking and many very many sick. I was suffering dreadfully with the universal complaint diarrhea so hot such a dreadful stench from the necessities, biscuit half cooked no place to poke one's head in where a moment's comfort could be found night or day. The sick strewed about, some delirious and crying out for their friends. I became so weak that I could scarcely walk. Ah, how bitter were my reflections when I thought of the death that I felt certain would soon overtake me and thought of my wife and children and that in spite of their hearts entreaties I had voluntarily left home to suffer such a fate.

[Passing by Reynosa]

We passed the town of Rhinosa²⁸ [Reynosa] without stopping the place is very high and well fortified and a few brave men might have defended it against all comers but the poor devils delivered up [the] town without striking a blow.

[Arrived at Camargo and concerned with missing oats]

arrived at Camargo Friday evening the 4th Sept 1846 when we reached the right bank of the San Juan [river]. When we were to land and encamp I found on ordering the forage ashore that 10 sacks of oats were missing. I had received at the Mouth of the Rio Grande of the asst. Qr. Mr. Capt Ogden²⁹ stationed there fifty sacks of oats. We took six horses on board at the mouth and got Col.

McClung's horse (which had run away or been stolen) at Matamoras three days after we left the mouth which made seven in all. As a sack of oats was wanting (they contained 2 bushels each) I marked it down and had it taken from the hatches. In this way 16 sacks were used, leaving 34 due me. Major Genl.

Patterson had six or 7 horses and mules aboard and Major Van Buren had 2 or 3. It was said among the hands and servants that Genl. Patterson's servants used one sack of our oats. Genl. Patterson had gone into the town [Camargo] when the deficiet [sic] was discovered by me. Capt. Pratt requested me to go across the river in the "Cross" and see Genl. Patterson that doubtless I could get the matter settled as soon as I saw Genl. Patterson – it was then late in the evening I waited on the Col. Cross sometime but Genl. Patterson did not return. I waited until near dark I went over the river in a ferry found out Capt. Holland I learned from him that the sacks landed 24 were brought within the lines and were under a guard.

[Looking for my trunk]

I then inquired for my baggage no one knew anything of it but soon Capt. Taylor told me and Capt. McManus³⁰ that they found my trunk bag of stationary and

lantern lying by themselves on the shore. No one had thought of them. It was only an accident that they had not been whipped off. I found my baggage at my friend's Capt. McManus' tent.

And hunting out the forage found a sentinel in charge and directed him not to let anyone have any oats without my orders. I then had my baggage taken down to Capt. Holland's tent with whom I had made an arrangement to mess.

I should have mentioned that while waiting on board the steam boat on the Camargo side for Genl. Patterson Capt. Reynolds one of the new asst. Qr. Mrs. From Tennessee being about to leave the boat to report himself to Col. Whiting asst. Qr. Mr. I thought it a good idea for me to do the same thing so I went with him. Col. Whiting remarked that I looked sick. I told him that I had been sick with diarrhea but that I got clear of it and was then initially well except debility. He asked me if I felt well enough to take the field. I told him certainly and that I knew riding would entirely restore me. This was near night he told me very well you will go forward and told me to call in the morning and get written instructions.

When I called in the morning what was my surprise to receive written instructions to remain at Camargo with Capt. Crossman.³¹ The secret was this Capt. Crossman heard from the Capt. Of the steam boat that night that there were on board two Qr. Mrs. One named Reynolds a delicate weakly man one named Smith a hale stalward man from the mountains of East Tennessee. What does he do but post off to Col. Whiting and lay claim to Smith that he wanted back a man and now Reynolds wished to remain at Camargo as his Tennessee friends were

stationed here under Genl. Pillow³² and I wished to go on by all means with the Miss Regt.

The next day Genl. Taylor Col. Whiting and the regulars took up the line of march for Seralvo³³ [Cerralvo]. In the hurry of departure an effort was made by Genl. Patterson and Capt. Crossman to get the order changed – but he would not trouble anymore about it – except to direct Capt. Reynolds to remain with Genl. Pillow. This is the history of my being ordered to stop at Camargo as I understand it.

Saturday Sept 5th

early in the morning left the Missi Camp and went over in the ferry boat to see after the oats.

[Buys food from Mexican]

I returned to the camp – as I landed on the opposite side I found a Mexican with milk and hot wheat cakes. I who had been living on pork and crackers for two weeks – bought a tin cup of the milk and a loaf – It was 8 or 9 o'clock – never was any repast so grateful. Some of my acquaintances coming by prevented me from shame from buying more.

[Boards on public steamer]

I went to col. Crossman's office with my baggage. About night he inquired if I had any place to board at. I told him I had not. He suggested that I had better go down for the evening on board one of the public steamers that they would charge me ½ dollar a meal that he boarded in a Spanish family, that they had taken him with reluctance and he did not know whether I could get in. I told him I would go aboard the boat as he suggested and in the mean time would be much obliged to him if he would try to get me board in the family he boarded in. This he promised to do.

[Meets a Surgeon]

There I sat on the guards of the steam boat solitary and alone. I was greatly relieved to be joined by an acquaintance Dr. Patton³⁴ of Raymond Hines County Missi. He had volunteered a private in the Raymond Fencibles and got the appointment of surgeon in the army through the instrumentality of some surgeon belonging to the regular army who had noticed his treatment of the sick while traveling together in a steam boat from the Mouth. He was on his way to the post to which he had been ordered to wit Matamoras: where there was an immense number of sick and a scarcity of Physicians. He was much concerned like myself at being detached from our regiment but he had much greater reasons to be pleased than I – more pay and a comfortably agreeable place.

Sunday Sept 6th

This was one of the busiest days / God forgive me and my country / of my life. Genl. Taylor had left the day before: the troops were to be sent on and anybody to be received and detached.

[At Don Gaspar's home and description of Mexican woman]

I dined today at my new boarding House (Capt. Crossman got me admitted) Don Gaspar's. I found my boading house a very delightful place – Don Gaspar was a native of old Spain born in Seville – He emigrated when young to Mexico and settled at Camargo a merchant where he married a Mexican lady – one of the aristocracy a very good looking short fat woman educated and accomplished as highly as the country would admit of. She has one sister and two nieces living with her. They seem to be very well behaved and modest young women. Every day when we went into Breakfast and dinner it was *Buenos Dios Capitano*, *Buenos Dios Senior*. Every night it was *Buenos Noches Capitano Buenos noches senior*.

[Meals at Don Gaspar's home]

They [were] used to meeting us in the eating [of] Breakfast Dinner and supper – retire when we commenced eating and return to our companies after meals if they found we had not left. Frequently we sat after supper on the back pavement – we in chairs and they on a sofa in front of us and then we would try to talk to them using such few Spanish words as we knew but calling in the aid of an American a brother boarder a Mr. Gilpin would offer to interpret-.

[Local guitar players]

Twice they sent out and brought in good guitar players from among their neighbours who played for us delightfully. Thus passing my time and sleeping soundly every night in a nice bunk in a tent which I pitched by the side of Capt. Crossman's in an orange grove, my spirits returned my health was perfectly restored.

[Description of food]

Goat's milk good coffee soup sweet bread mutton chop pure water and the smile of a woman can work wonders on a sick man who has been living in the sand and physicked on government crackers and fried pork. At least this was my experience.

[More on dining]

From Monday Sept. 7th to

Thursday, Sept. 24th my life was pretty much the same staying with Capt. Crossman in his office by day eating with him at Don Gaspar's and going to sleep when he did in my tent.

When our meals were ready a Mexican boy would come over to the office and say "Capitan soupper ready" The men in the office taught him at least how to call the different meals. This boy whose name was Gerotaya about 12 years old was

very smart considering he was Mexican and so impressed was he with the superiority of the whites that if any one said to him interrogatively *Mexicano* he would indignantly reply *non No Mexicano! Americano*.

[Illness among soldiers]

During the period above mentioned there were a great many discharges of the soldiers on account of sickness. It was my business to give them passports to the Mouth of the Rio Grande which it afforded me the greatest pleasure to do having witnessed their sufferings.

I would with apparent nonchalance examine their surgeon's and commanding officer's certificate and write the permission to go on any public boat to the mouth of the Rio Grande.

[Mexican express]

There was a great time when expresses were being started for Headquarters. They were carried by hired Mexicans who were employed at \$45 a month and everything found them. They were furnished with the fleetest horses – equipment of the best materials and the best arms. They carried the despatches in a pair of saddle bags which were secured against the weather by skins and the flaps sealed.

When the express arrived it was equally or greater an occasion, in would come the Mexican generally in the evening with a look of triumph and satisfaction his saddle bags in one hand his whip in the other the chains of his spurs gingling
[sic]

[U.S. hired a Mexican spy]

During the above period Texans on the way to Matamoras were attacked by the Mexican Rancheros – one Texan was killed – The survivors when they got to

Matamoras returned with a party of fifty men and in revenge laid waste some three or four ranches. A party of five or six Texans who had been left behind at Mier⁴¹ were attacked while on their way from Mier to Monterey and killed their brains knocked out and their bodies mutilated.

A few days before I removed to the opposite side of the river Col. Taylor⁴² the head of the Commissary department arrived with specie en route for Monterey.

Some days after the report had reached Camargo that there were ten thousand Mexicans in the neighborhood Capt. Crossman finding no one else would do it and being anxious as to the fate of one of his expresses who was two or three days behind his time sent out a spy to ascertain the truth as to the whereabouts the numbers and the intentions of the Mexicans. He hired at a small price a Mexican in whom he could rely who under the pretense of selling piloncillo (candied sugar tied up in rolls about the size of Bologna sausages) was to go to their camp and while selling his pelonceau gather what information he could. He set out Saturday 12th and spent Sunday 13th in the Mexican camp and returned the next day. The news he brought was that instead of 10,000 Mexicans there were only 300 that these were rancheros and citizens of Mier Rhinosa Matamoras and Camargo. That they were some 20 miles from Camargo that they were under the command of Canales that their object was to cut off communications between Camargo and Monterrey and plunder the wagons pack mules destroy small parties and above all seize the despatches intended for Genl. Taylor. Capt. Crossman told col Taylor of these things but there had been so many everlasting false reports that the col did not seem to give the account much importance.

Thursday 24th Sept

moved across the River directly opposite Camargo. The superintendent and all the hands professed great pleasure

[Local fights]

Capt. Two Mexicans and a volunteer are fighting and a crowd is gathering threatening a great disturbance what must I do sir. "Take them under arrest" this I said with the most martial look and pronunciation that I could command. I expected to see a dreadful affray in honor of my new command. I followed the Sergeant with my eyes he took an other of the guard. They marched to the combatants and such were the tones of authority with which he spoke and his military bearing that he marched off the combatants and dispersed the crowd without the least difficulty.

[His anguish feelings about coming to war theater]

Friday Sept 25th

My birth-day 39 years. Oh! Lord so old and I have done so little. I have been of but little benefit to myself or any one else,

And again I took this step of coming here against my wife's entreaties and perhaps I shall never see her and the children again. From the moment I got out of my bunk I felt as if I had reached a crisis in my life. I never felt more mental agony. I was sure something dreadful was to happen to me. As Friday was an unlucky day I determined to stay in my tent and attempt no new thing.

{Tents near military depot}

Looking off to the west of me I discovered tents going up ground staked out etc. for an encampment which threatened [to] approach within a few feet of me. Seeing Mr. Angel I beckoned to him we sought out the Commander who proved to be Major Wall⁵⁹ commanding (the 1st and 2d Cols. Being both sick) one of the Ohio Regiments. After some argument and representation that his proposed camp

would crowd the depot ground too much: He agreed surcease and to pitch the rest of his tents in a line with those already up on the other side of the road.

[Drunkenness of volunteers]

Saturday the 26th

it was represented to me that there had been the 2 days preceding an unusual number of drunken volunteers about the depot and that danger was apprehended of serious brawls besides the volunteers were in habit of shooting off their guns in such a careless manner that a man had been shot in the arm and that the lives of men were needlessly endangered by the practice.

[First reports of battle at Monterrey]

Sunday morning the 27th About 8 o'clock that evening two of the quartermaster's men arrived from

Monterey and also Capt. Eaton⁶⁰ of the army with despatches from Genl. Taylor on his way to Washington Capt. Eaton crossed the river for Capt. Crossman's quarters without a moment's delay. The men stopped at Col. Cumming's sutler's store to tell the news ... what then was our surprise to learn that the most desperate battle had been fought that it commenced Monday morning the 21st and continued day and night until Thursday evening. How fought the Mississippians I enquired with the greatest valor said one like damnation said another.